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## Social Care Students' Preparedness and Anticipations for Practice

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# **Recognising the Complexity of the Transition to Practice: Social Care Students' Anticipations and Preparedness for Practice**

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- \* Literature suggests that the transition to practice has not being investigated with social care practitioners.
- \* Asking students about their views of their preparedness for practice allows educators to evaluate the programme.
- \* In context of HE strategies pushing employment readiness what do the new graduates themselves think?
  - \* Preparedness as contested concept (Tham & Lynch, 2014).
- \* Student satisfaction with training and positive experiences during it linked to occupational commitment and career longevity (Criss, 2010).

## \* Rationale

- \* Aim of research is to explore students views on:
  - \* Stage 1 - Preparation for and anticipations of the transition to practice (end of final year)
  - \* Stage 2 - Experiences of the transition to practice (9 to 12 months later)

## \* Research Aims

- \* An interpretivist approach used as it “implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’” (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p.7).
- \* Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 social care students towards the end of their final academic year in college.
- \* The students were then interviewed a second time between 9 and 12 months later.
- \* Interviews thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## \* Research Design

- \* 13 female and 4 male - (class group 33 female and 9 male)
- \* Age range 20 - 49 years
- \* Average age 24.7 years (SD - 7.4 years)
  - \* 1 student had completed a degree
  - \* 3 had started but not completed another degree
  - \* 5 had completed FETAC training
  - \* 9 had come directly from secondary school

## \* Sample Details

- \*Protection as a student
- \*Motivation to study social care work
- \*Preparation
  - \*Role of academic work
  - \*Role of placement
- \*Expectations of self and readiness
- \*Anticipations and fears about practice

## \*Findings



- \* Student life more scheduled (Flatau, 2005) and associated with learning (McSweeney, 2011; Kearns & McArdle, 2012).
- \* Unexpected issues arise in the workplace and time limitations (Flatau, 2005).
- \* While exposed to the workplace with placements these are “structured educational opportunities” (O’Connor et al., 2004).
- \* Where
  - \* The student is protected from the politics of the workplace.
  - \* Has time to make sense of experiences in relation to theoretical frameworks (Le Maistre & Paré, 2004).

## \* Differences - College vs Work



- \* “[...] there would have been doors closed in the room that I was in and the staff would have gone out and tried to deal with the situation; like they did with the time in the kitchen when your man took up the knife. They kind of pushed me back to the side and stood in front of me and then when they went up they had locked the door into the kitchen. Because obviously I am not supposed to deal with anything like that.”
- \* “The work they do is fab but like there was a couple of fights and you saw knives and you’re so worried then if somebody does give you a hug, of a needle prick. I’m not safe and that could just happen to anybody. It’s not ‘cos I’m a student and it did happen to two of them when I was there. [...] When things did go bad we were the first to be moved out of direct danger.”

## \* Protection

- \* “I got to hear them as well sniping at the upstairs people. Or the director asking somebody downstairs. It was downstairs/upstairs and that’s how I put it in my project. To make tea. Tea for them to have their weekly meeting.”
- \* “There was a lot of tension in the staff room and a lot of staff members. You could tell they didn’t like each other at all. And it was very kind of oh Jesus and for me as a student, everyone was coming to me with their giving out about this person and that person.”

## \* Awareness of Workplace Politics

Because like you're our supervisor really. Our tutor is. That is where we have our proper supervision I think. So I think we need someone like that when we're working.

It was good to have the lecturers and stuff to kind of help you think about maybe where you are at now and kind of let you reflect on like that type of thing, and to outline even just to yourself like what you would kind of like to work on or what you see kind of in your own life that you might want to improve like, and I think the lecturers really brought that out.

Then in college getting supervision It was nice to know that somebody else was going 'okay maybe we need to take a little bit more of time with her' [...] do they kind of suspect that maybe I need a little bit more supervision. I don't know. I'm not really sure but it was nice. If that's what was going on it was great

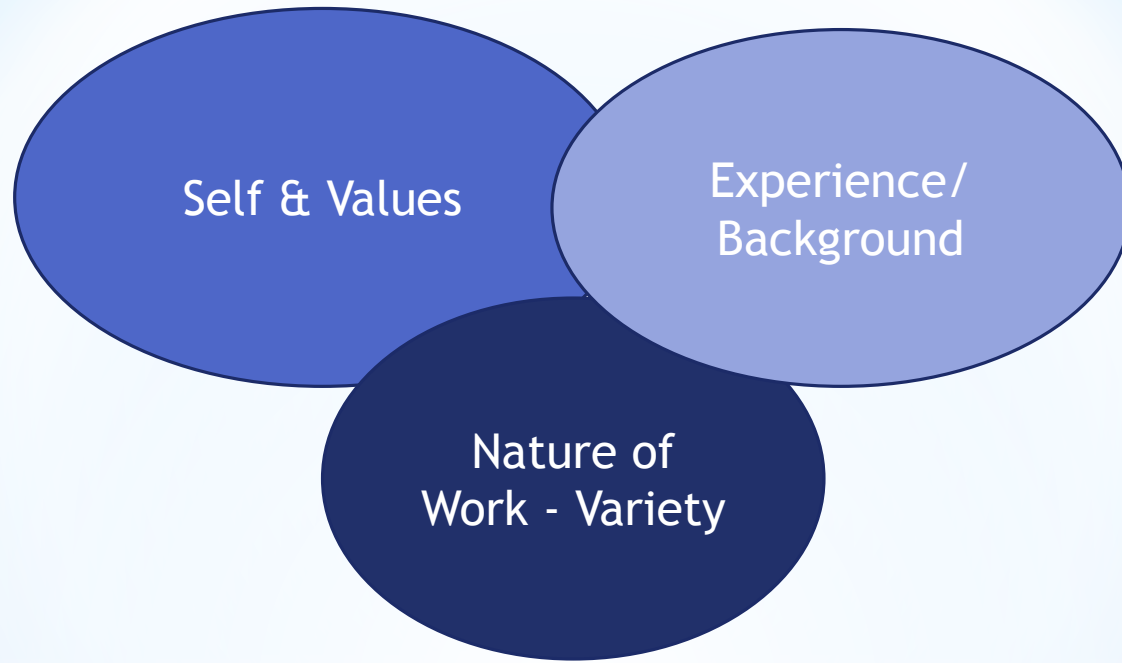
There was always staff that you could turn to, it didn't have to be what was laid out like, your tutor.



# College Support

- \* Social work research
  - \* Desire to help others
  - \* Feeling of achievement
  - \* Fits with own value system
- \* (Facchini & Giraldo, 2013)
- \* Broadness of the education
- \* Variety in employment areas
- \* Helping others and society
- \* (Tham & Lynch, 2014)

\* **Motivation for choice  
of work**



# \*Motivation

I just always liked working with people and being sociable. So I wanted a job that I was going to enjoy and something that was going to be different every day.

I was in a disadvantaged school in primary school and [...] I used to always notice kids coming out without socks and all, and I used to always remember other kids slugging them and all, and I would always be the one the teacher would ask me would they sit beside me because I wouldn't be mean to anybody

Within the same career I can work with children, I can work with homeless, I can work with addiction and I like that because I don't like being stuck to one thing for too long.

When people are coming into you and they have all these stories, even their coping skills when they're having a conversation with you is non-existent. Why does that happen?

My mam used to be a social worker and she used to have a day care centre for kids, so I would have been around that kind of work a lot.

\***Motivation**



- \* Realisation that all/most material covered was relevant in final year.
  - \* “I wouldn’t have thought about it at all [...] But this year I don’t know why but everything seemed more relevant. I think the stuff we covered and then the stuff that we covered from the last few years was most relevant in this year’s placement; psychology and groups and that kind of stuff. sociology was really a big thing, I wouldn’t think it would be when I was doing it. [...] The social policy is the hardest to get, to link to the practice. That is just, I always found that irrelevant but it is not.”
- \* College encourages you to question and be critical.
  - \* “It was hard and I did find it difficult but it actually really made you think and you learned stuff.”

## \* Academic Work Relevance



- \* Knowledge of other cultures (too centred on the Western world)

- \* “[...] where the community raises the child so they’re really attached to the community even more so than their family members. And I think you need to look into that. I think there’s misconceptions as well.”

- \* Practical elements related to practice - e.g. first aid; manual handling; TCI

- \* **Academic work - What was missing?**

You can only learn so much from theory in classes and all that. It is hands on and you get like proper experiences, stuff happens and you have to deal with you, you have to know how to deal with it. Whereas you can hear stories all day in college but there is no feeling of what it is like unless you are there like, if you know what I mean.

I don't think the course would be the same without the placement because you couldn't just go out into the real world, you wouldn't know what to do.

You kind of get up your own kind of skills really. And like say I am kind of a lot less apprehensive about getting work and about going into kind of another work setting, because I have done three different ones already I feel like I can go into work and work as part of a team or whatever better. I suppose be more effective like.

Challenging situations, which you wouldn't, you know, you can talk and you can have examples but until you experience it and see it or observe it you really don't have a clue how you will respond and how your body will respond.

# \* Importance of Placement

- \* There is learning even when there seems to be little structure and direction - need to adapt to different styles and settings.
- \* But inconsistency about student's role from the team is frustrating.
- \* Determination not to fall into 'bad' practice and fear of burnout.
- \* 3<sup>rd</sup> year expectations - last chance need to learn as much as possible.

## \* Placement

It was the best learning experience for me by a mile. Because you can go through things and you'll never see challenging behaviour and you never see team dynamics.

I think some of them in the end actually learned more about themselves than they would have if it had been structured. It was just the process was painful at times.

It was a personal training. I think I went in there a little bit shy, a little bit like, trying to force myself to be in there and not really wanted but you know, I just had to get over it and say, look I am here to learn and I have to do this. That's what I want to do, because there is no point me going out to practice now and saying 'I don't know how to do this or work on my own without supervision'. Everyone needs a certain amount of supervision but you need to be able to work on your own. I just learned quite quickly I needed to do that.

\*There is always learning

- \* Appreciation that social care involves constant learning:
  - \* “we never kind of will be the final product that’s the thing about social care, you’re always learning, you’ll always have to update your skills and that’s a good thing because if you do think you know it all then you become complacent.”
  - \* “So something that is going to happen that hasn’t happened yet. I won’t know how to deal with it so it is going to be inevitable. You are going to make mistakes along the way and you just have to hope that it is not something really bad.”

## \* Nature of Social Care and Readiness

- \* Accountability
- \* Responsibility
- \* Being able to use skills

\* Anticipations

Like you have a lot more responsibility and accountability. Like you are there to meet the client's needs.

You are responsible for the decision you make. I suppose as a student if you are doing one on one work you can go into your supervisor and go “Look can I say this? Is that ok to say? Is it ok to ask that?” you know. As a professional I would feel less inclined to go and say “Is this ok? Am I saying the right thing? Am I doing the right thing?” and I would just say it and then worry about did I say the wrong thing.

Just kind of being able to use the skills because you're kind of restricted as a student.

I'm looking forward to having people that I can key work and be responsible for helping them. [...] last year in placement I just kept thinking “I want to key work this person because I have ideas for them that I think would work.”

# \*Anticipations



I do feel like I'm ready, I just want to go and get in there and start working. I'm excited as well because it's going to be different. [...] I like being challenged and thrown in the deep end.

I'm not that assertive as a person, which I need to develop.

I'd be all over an internship because I'm not ready. I'd be like please support me in any ways you'd like to.

I'm mature but I still don't have the background for some of the areas.

\* Conditional readiness  
based on view of self

- \* Being drawn into bad practice.
- \* Not being accepted by colleagues.
- \* Conflict between these - fear of challenging perceived bad practice and being accepted (Agllias, 2010).
- \* Being a qualified practitioner is associated with responsibility, competence and accountability (Rungapadiachy, Madill & Gough, 2006; Ferguson & Day, 2007).

## \* Fears

## \* Burnout and Complacency

\* “If you don’t know your role, if you’re experiencing challenging behaviour all the time that is going to wear you down.”

\* “And I think there’s so many social care workers out there who are kind of, a bit maybe lazy. There are ones that are bad and you’re able to continue and that’s something I’m so afraid of now [...] that I would become the social care worker who’s kind of complacent.”

# \* Fears

- \* Making mistakes
  - \* “Doing something wrong. Breaking policies.”
- \* Appearing competent
  - \* “How okay is it to ask ten questions? Do you ask five and figure it out yourself ‘cos you’ve to appear competent.”
- \* Fitting in
  - \* “I’m apprehensive about going to a place where I don’t get on with the staff or I don’t feel part of a team.”

\* Fears

- \*Workplaces need to provide additional training and provide an environment where new practitioners can obtain support from colleagues (Agllias, 2010; Bates et al., 2010).

## \*Expectations of Support

I think it is really important for me to find the right organisation. So if I feel comfortable that I have a nice or an approachable manager or supervisor who offers supervision and it is a policy, then I am more likely to stay with that organisation

I would think I would first go to co-workers; like the people that you are with on the ground. And like if the issue cannot be resolved or whatever then I would go to management. But like it depends like on the whole team structure and the environment as well like. That might influence who I go to. But I would go to the staff first and my co-workers.

I'm sure most places have supervision or some form of it anyway and I think it's important to make use of it. You know like if something was bothering you, bring it up because you do see that things do bother people and they bring it up in really inappropriate ways. [...] Even if you're finding it difficult. I'm kind of seeing it more now, if you do keep that in, in the long run it's not helping you and it's not going to help anyone you're working on behalf of.

# \*Expectations of Support